



disquiet

hailey algoe

crw 315p  
34813



## **Carotenoid Blues**

The stench of the sticky red dirt is heavy  
in the mouth and in the back of the throat.  
I cough up a fistful of sugar, spit  
it in a sweet little clump onto the shifting  
sands beneath my feet.

The sky is a hollow drinking vessel, laced  
with cracks and mended with gold, sloppy,  
dripping down, its molten ooze  
seeping through sewer grates and staining  
the hood of my car.

Your words were like dancers, their  
slow waltz slumping down into the  
liquid foundations of every desperately  
wiggling tower we ever slept in. Your words  
were the scratchy flannel on my back on a  
too-hot autumn afternoon.

We don't really get autumn here—  
Something almost like it, where the clouds  
cry out a bit louder, vaporous mewing  
lamenting their gradual warm-color tinge.  
Redshift has a different meaning  
here, dodging steps in our foxtrot  
with the physicists' dreams.

If it's all true, and a poem is a séance  
and we're all hurtling desperately apart,  
where are you going,  
and what is it that will meet you out there?  
I can't quite make it out from down  
here, trunk half-submerged  
and teeth sinking into  
the packed Southern clay.

## **Waltz**

Phrenetic, soupy, like the way  
the cello dances with the horn

and the sound is swallowed up by  
the tiny whisper-pockets in the  
blocks of concrete around us.

This is the way the ooze  
swimming through my arteries  
congeals and my veins nuzzle their  
noses a few dermal layers deeper

when I see the glinting of a needle in  
the gap between your front teeth.

This is the ever-echo,  
the effervescent reverberations,  
creeping tendrils encroaching forward  
through the gummy soup of time,

accompanied in step,  
keeping the beat with the low hum  
we call consequence.

## Catch

It's not the type of delicate feeling  
you can easily fold into song—

It's not elegant,  
eloquent, sensual—  
It's senseless.

It's an ember at the base of the throat  
just hot enough to scorch the windpipe  
and give smoke to the voice.

It's not a delicate feeling,  
but it's not quite  
jealousy, either.

It's a playful sort of thing—  
A sharp blade, tossed across the room  
half in jest  
that just grazes the  
exposed skin of the back and  
clatters to the floor  
like a chuckle.

It's a dismissal, it's a  
regret for the best damn  
attribute your mother taught you:  
It's agreeable,  
It's complacent,  
It's wanting to be easy.

It's not the delicate type of feeling  
you lace into a letter or poem or note—

But it gets stuck  
behind your teeth,  
and for some reason you can't just  
unclench them  
and let it  
spill out.



## **Skeleton Closets**

In the fray,  
seismic churn  
creeping towards its  
screeching, inevitable  
halt— I am  
grasping at the  
threads of other people's  
stories, unraveled  
timelines  
we drag around  
like gooey baggage,  
displaying where we  
have been by  
where we *be*,  
vaulting forward through  
cascades of runny  
moments, desperate to  
grab on to just one, like  
pressing Jello through a  
sieve.

It's a parametric sorcery,  
weaving a terrible cat's  
cradle  
of nonlinear incantations,  
hopelessly entangling our  
narratives and pulling,  
tugging,  
ripping at the knots.

## Poem for Jeanne Gang

The cartographer's realm is that  
of the soft curve,       the undulating  
                ripple, the domain of the feminine  
                                form of the valleys and of the open,  
                beckoning      shallows of the sea.

Hulking bodies step along the skyline  
in formation, revealing their  
skeletons by the shape of their skin,  
inviting the tiny lines of ants  
below to look up in awe of their  
sturdy feet and handsome backs.

Their spines straight, alert at attention—  
 scoliosis is a dirty word to men  
 like these. To them, Truth is blatant  
 honesty, Truth is respect to the guardian  
 angels of statics and force, and to  
 them, Truth is beauty.

The realm of the cartographer is that  
of deceit. The valleys and hills and  
the flora laced upon them do not reveal to us  
every secret with a glance. As much  
as we are awed by the masculine crags  
of cliff sides, barren canyons, they reveal too much.

The land knows modesty, and the  
cartographer knows to lie  
to the human eye, seduce our love of  
sinews and roundness, and exploit  
our most desperate need to  
fill in the blanks.

Topography transposed, dancing facades  
and twisting axes and the architecture  
of trickery— here is a soldier marching  
ever so slightly out of place.

## Solvent

exorcise the river stones  
heavy in between the  
bottoms of my lungs  
a weight lifted from the top  
of my stomach's lining

spit up algae and moss  
dribbling  
down  
my chin

and suddenly,  
the air is oily

and the air is  
heavy in my nose

and the air is  
seeping into my skin

and the air is a  
silken nightgown melting into  
my epidermal layers  
occlusive

we peel it off  
and begin to iron out  
the folds.



## **Friday October**

A big sour blackberry sleeps  
surreptitiously behind my yellow front teeth  
not unlike the way a years-forgotten cough drop  
jostles around at the back of a sooty desk drawer.  
I sample the shine of each glossy dark  
bulb with the tip of my tongue,  
serpentine.

On this same Friday one year ago, I  
sliced off the tip of my finger with a safety knife  
and held it under the faucet while  
the water ran red, red,  
ran red.

On this same Friday two years ago, I  
cut a small cake into thirty small slivers  
as though for a kindergarten class.

On this same Friday three years ago, I  
don't remember a thing that happened:  
I was alone.

I'm not sure which of these facts  
feeds the other.

I will turn twenty years old in two days.  
The water here is poison now, and I nick  
my cheek on a soft sheet of cardboard.  
I wear heavy shoes and eat black licorice out of the bag.

I press my tongue between the  
bulbs and they crush, easily.  
The berry is sour.  
I'm not sure how  
I knew this already.

### **Weeps and Flashing**

Dipping toes in tepid water,  
the silty stuff that pools up  
in the attic and seeps out down  
the walls, into the living room,  
drip by drip by night by night  
over the course of twenty autumn  
evenings.

In the summer the walls  
bleed the memories of ones  
they ache to remember, the ones  
who used to smoke in bed, only  
socks to cap their feet against  
the cantankerous haze.  
We find this repulsive, and are  
duty-bound to leave each crumpled  
cotton sheath discarded around  
the bedskirt before we sleep.

You and I sleep in the coals of a  
friendly fire, and I keep my eyes  
trained on your chapped and crumbling  
lips. You kiss me and it tastes like  
a mouthful of ash: warm and sweet  
and entropic. I swallow.